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Border crossings as soft power: international relations, digital diplomacy and the 'border control museum complex'

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Abstract: Museums dedicated to migration and migration-processing facilities have proliferated around the world in recent times. The purpose of this paper is to explore how these institutions, through their communicative practices on social media, are shaping contemporary narratives about border control, national identity and global politics. The paper examines two of the most notorious examples of what Walters calls the 'border control museum complex', namely Berlin's Wall Museum at Check Point Charlie and New York's Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration. Through a netnographical analysis of these museums' Facebook official accounts, the paper shows how their communicative practices construct a liberal vision of border crossings as sites of freedom and opportunity, glossing over the exclusionary features of borders and border control.

Keywords: border control; migration; museum; international relations; digital diplomacy; social media.

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1 Introduction: museums and the symbolic nature of border crossings

International borders are a constitutive element in the modern state system. Formally, states cannot be recognised as members of the international community if they do not possess a *defined* territory (Natoli and Riccardi, 2019). The term 'defined' implies the existence of some form of territorial boundary that separates a sovereign political entity from others and that guarantees that it is treated as an independent entity. Functionally,

borders are a means to control who can enter and exit the national territory and they are supposed to provide protection for the country they wrap around and the people who live within them, even though in practice they do not always live up to this responsibility (Longo, 2017). Borders also play an important symbolic function in modern states. They represent the outer limits of a country's body politic and of the 'imagined community' that populates it (Anderson, 1983; Brambilla et al., 2015). For this reason, borders have become a component of national collective identities, in some cases acquiring a quasi-sacred status.

The symbolic dimension of borders is reproduced in narratives about their origins and place in the country's history. One of the ways these narratives are reproduced and expanded is through the establishment of dedicated cultural-historic museums in the sites where border control facilities were operating. The choice of the location is due to the facilities' evocative nature and the presence of the original infrastructure. These arrangements are part of a global trend towards the 'museufication of migration' (Torres, 2011). Early examples of border-themed museums are Berlin's Wall Museum at Check Point Charlie (1962) and the El Paso's Border Patrol Museum (1979). Since the 1990s, these establishments have proliferated globally. This is the case for Ellis Island Museum of Immigration in the USA (1990), the Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Canada (1999), the Border Force Museum in the UK (1994), the European Museum Schengen in Luxembourg (2010). Migration museums exist in most sending and receiving countries around the world, although they are not located at historical border points. Examples in Europe include the Portuguese Emigration Museum (Lisbon, Portugal), Migration Museum (London, UK), Irish Emigration Museum (Dublin, Ireland); the Red Star Line Museum (Antwerp, Belgium); in Australia, the Migration Museum (Adelaide), the Immigration Museum (Melbourne); in South America, the Museo de la Inmigración (Buenos Aires, Argentina)[1].

Albeit inspired and shaped by local historical circumstances, these institutions, through their existence and activities, have collectively contributed to the formulation of the meaning of borders in today's world, be it as 'gates' to a better future for the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free"[2] or as embodiments of the exclusionary nature of the territorial state system (Jones, 2016). In this sense, these facilities represent what Walters (2006, p.198) calls an emerging "border control museum complex". By 'complex' is meant not only in the architectural sense – as structures with similar functions – but also in terms of the type of discursive practices they perform when engaging with the public. These overlapping and interconnected practices shape the content of the emerging global narrative about the meaning of border control in contemporary societies, and how this narrative is built upon individual countries' 'border heritage' (Lois, 2019). The type of 'soft' power (Nye, 1990) these museums exert is, therefore, in contrast to the 'hard' (i.e., material) one represented by other types of economic 'complexes', such as those involving the military or immigration apparatuses (Golash-Boza, 2009; Dunne and Sköns 2014).

The symbolic and evocative nature of the subject matters they deal with has meant that these museums are inextricably linked with debates about national identity in the countries hosting them (Jenkins, 2016; Sutherland, 2014). A less debated aspect of these institutions' activities is their impact on international relations (Sylvester, 2015). Border-themed museums have become active in the international realm by 'globalising' the content of their exhibitions and by intensifying their outreach activities targeting international partners (visitors or other foreign institutions). These practices have

expanded in scope and become more sophisticated, involving a more extensive use of digital tools. By highlighting the global connections among different experiences of bordering, these museums have sought to provide a new vision of the phenomenon of border control. They have also projected a different image of the host country to the rest of the world, acting as informal ambassadors. These public relations efforts have been conducted mainly online through the museums' social media handles. In this sense, border-themed museums have followed the path of other national and international organisations that have become active players in the emerging field of 'digital diplomacy' (Bjola and Zaiotti, 2020).

To explore the international dimension of border-themed museums, the paper considers the digital diplomacy practices of two of the most notorious members of the 'border control museum complex', namely Berlin's Wall Museum at Check Point Charlie (in German, Mauermuseum – Museum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie) and New York's Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration. Relying upon a netnographical analysis of these institutions' public relations activities[3], this work examines their efforts to engage national and international audiences online, focusing on the museums' official accounts on the social media platform Facebook.

By following this line of inquiry, the paper seeks to contribute to the literature on museums as actors in international relations (Grincheva, 2013, 2020; Tidy and Turner, 2020; Sylvester, 2015). This body of work has highlighted how these institutions have joined the list of non-state actors that are challenging the supremacy of states in international relations (Taylor, 2019). This literature's primary focus has been on 'museum diplomacy', namely the growing role these institutions play as a country's political, economic and cultural ambassadors on the world stage (Grincheva, 2019). The present work builds on these contributions to include an understudied aspect of museums' soft power, namely the communicative dimension as expressed through new media channels (Drotner and Schrøder, 2014).

The paper is organised as follows. The first section examines the nexus between borders, museums, and politics. The second section focuses on the international dimension of border-themed museums. The third section presents the case studies of Check Point Charlie and Ellis Island museums. The concluding section considers some of the implications of the findings for the study of borders and digital diplomacy.

2 The politics of border control museums

When considered for their symbolic value, borders tend to be represented in abstract terms. What matters is not the actual boundary line for the purpose of imagining a community but an ideal(ised) version of it. In some circumstances, however, what holds value in the country's imagination is not even the borderline per se – as a line surrounding a country – but the entry points along these boundary lines. The relevance of this entry points, whether along a land or at seaports, is heightened in the case of countries whose histories are shaped by these very border crossings. Traditional countries of immigration, such as the USA or Canada, fall into this category, as they were built around the movement of people entering their territories. The physical 'legal' entrance into the body politic occurs through selected points of entry. Today, these locations are manly airports, but in the first part of the 20th century, the era of mass migration, seaports welcomed most incoming migrants (Fahrmeir et al., 2003). In these locations,

facilities were built so that migrants could be processed and officially allowed to enter the country. These facilities were shut once the era of mass migration came to a close and other means of transportation (i.e., air) and processing (away from the border) became available. The facilities built in these locations became symbols of the migration experience itself as a social phenomenon, capturing the lives and tribulations of those who passed through them or worked there. They represented the formal and symbolic rite of passage into a new country. However, the symbolic dimension of some points of entry is not limited to examples of locations involving controls over 'regular' cross-border movements. This is the case for locations where these movements were severely restricted. The most notorious examples are the various heavily fortified 'check points' built along the Berlin Wall. The Eastern German state built these infrastructures during the Cold War as a defensive mechanism to address potential cross-border threats. In reality, they functioned as a system to prevent the escape of its citizens toward West Germany. The "best border security system in the world", as Eastern German officials described it, became a living symbol of not only a divided country but the Cold War itself. Its fall in 1989 signified the end of an era, paving the way for the end of East-West tensions and German reunification. As for migration facilities in countries of immigration, places like Check Point Charlie in Berlin became part of the global collective imagination, markers of German identity and world history.

Given their historical and cultural relevance, it is not surprising that border crossings and their facilities have become the object of attention of heritage-preserving efforts and turned into museums. Border-themed museums take different forms. Some museums located at the border focus not on cross-border movements per se but on socio-economic exchanges between border regions, whose material and visual representations are collected and displayed as 'border heritage' (Prokkola and Lois, 2016). This is the case, for instance, of the Border Museum in Kirkenes, Norway, which showcases artefacts representing life along the Norway-Russian border or Maine's Border Historical Museum along the US-Canada border. Museums built on former fortified border control facilities include Check Point Charlie Museum in Berlin, and the Museums of the Inner German Border in various locations along Germany's former East-West frontier. Museums dedicated to border control forces and their activities have been established as well, such as the Border Patrol Museum near the US-Mexico border in El Paso (US) and the Border Force National Museum located in Liverpool (UK), in recognition of the Northern English city's history as an international port. Finally, some museums are dedicated to the abolition of border controls. The most notorious is the European Museum Schengen located in the Luxembourg town where the treaty that abolished border controls in Europe was signed in the mid-1980s.

Like other cultural-historical heritage institutions, museums dedicated to border control are built for the purpose of conserving the legacy of the border experience in the country where they are located. As 'vehicles of memory' [Confino, (1997), p.1386], they not only reproduce the past but also transform it into "a shared cultural knowledge by successive generations" [Confino, (1997), p.1386]. They accomplish this goal by building narratives that emotionally connect the subjects under display in their exhibits to a contemporary audience (Watson, 2013). Border-themed museums also project a particular vision of those involved in the border experience, be it migrants or the border force monitoring them (Moreno, 2012; Thomas, 2011). Museums, alongside other cultural institutions, can become themselves symbols of the host country and embody particular culture and values [Hoogwaerts, (2016), p.315].

Like their counterparts in the cultural-historical realm, border-themed museums' constitutive features as organisations – from the rationale for their creation to their mandate, practices and content of the collections – are the result of negotiations among different stakeholders about the meaning, content and boundaries of the collective memory they are supposed to represent. For this reason, these museums are inherently political entities (Gray, 2015). Sylverster (2009) goes as far as to say they are 'heavily political'. The most prominent political dimension of museums (in general and cultural-historic ones in particular) is related to the role they have played in countries' nation-building (Aaronson and Elgenius, 2014). Whether implicitly stated or not, one of the key mandates of museums is fostering a sense of national identity among the local population. In some cases, museums have become 'temples' where the country's history is not merely displayed but also venerated. Because of the political nature of cultural-historical museums and their exhibitions, museums have become sites of contestation, where issues of power, memory and justice have come to the fore (Horsti, 2019; Cameron and Mengler, 2012). Museums, especially in the Western world, have also had to address the colonial legacy of this institution and the issue of restitutions of items in their collections originating from the global South (Tom, 1998; Abungu, 2019).

Politics is also at the core of migration and border control-themed museums (Jenkins, 2016). These museums are often built with explicit nation-building objectives (Sutherland, 2014). These institutions project a particular view of the country's past and how it relates to its present. In countries of immigration with histories of colonialism, their presence raises questions about the country's colonial legacy and how this legacy is handled (or erased). In this sense, museums represent everyday sites of coloniality and racialisation (Bennett, 2009; Tidy and Turner, 2020). In recently re-unified countries such as Germany, border-themed museums address the legacy of the East-West divide, highlighting the dark side of communist oppression and the appeal of free and democratic societies.

Border-themed museums do not just look at the past. They also actively contribute to contemporary debates about a country's identity. They do so by (re)creating narratives about who is a member of the national community and who is not (Ross, 2015). In this way, they contribute to contemporary debates about the place of multiculturalism in countries of immigration (Pieterse, 1997). Border-themed museums also contribute to the re-imagining of a country by creating a particular vision of the practice of bordering and the subjects of monitoring. Border-themed museums highlight the role of border agents as contributors to nation-building, either by protecting the country from external threats or ensuring that those who entered it did so safely. In some instances, these portrayals of border agents tend to glorify them. These agents are then contrasted with 'aliens' who threaten the stability of the national community (Barrera, 2010). Border-themes museums, however, can question accepted notions of national identity and the host country's historical trajectory, in turn undermining the original rationale for the creation of public museums. Although still relatively uncommon, border-themed museums do address the 'dark side' of a country's immigration history or the mistreatment of individuals passing through border control facilities. The Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, for instance, features in its permanent exhibition material and stories about Canada's racist immigration policies. However, the critical takes typically focus on historical wrongs, while contemporary restrictive border control practices and their impact on migrants are glossed over (Carr, 2015).

3 Border museums, international relations and digital diplomacy

Besides having a role in domestic politics, museums also play a role in international relations (Sylvester, 2015; Tidy and Turner, 2020). This international connection has been apparent since the birth of the modern museum. The original mandate of the British Museum, the first national museum in the world – it was established in 1753 – was to "allow visitors to address through objects, both ancients and more recent, questions of contemporary politics *and international relations*" [quoted in MacGregor (2004), emphasis added]. Museums have often engaged with 'global' themes, showing items from other cultures or staging displays based on transnational topics [e.g., AIDS, mobility, and travel; Mason, (2013), p.14]. However, the international dimension of museums is more clearly exemplified by these institutions' engagements with other public and private stakeholders around the world. Current processes of globalisation in the economic, political, social and cultural realms have contributed to the expansion of museums' mandates and practices beyond narrow national confines, turning them into transnational actors that enhance the profile and reputation of the country where they are based (Mason, 2013).

Museums' transnational activities include offering temporary loans or exchanges of individual objects or collections to other counties and, in some cases, creating partner galleries or international franchises, a practice that has boomed in recent times [Hoogwaerts, (2016), p.315]. Museums' relationship with their target audience has also changed and become more global. By design, museums – unlike private collections – are open spaces that encourage visitors to attend. The profile of the prospective visitor varies depending on the theme and content of the collections held at the premises. Museums also actively seek to entice specific audiences with targeted communication and advertising. This is the case for the nationality of the visitors, which could be either national or international. The British Museum was created "for the use of learned and studious men (sic), *both native and foreign*" [quoted in MacGregor (2004), emphasis added]. Presenting the exhibitions in foreign languages is the most direct means to reach this audience; targeted advertising in foreign countries is another one. Data show that a large proportion of museum visits are by non-nationals [Hoogwaerts, (2016), p.315].

In the past, museums treated visitors as passive recipients of the content that curators provided. Today museums engage more directly with their visitors. Museums have become more audience-centred and play the role of facilitators of cultural exchanges rather than imposing their authority. As Garoian (2001) argues,

> "(…) the relationship between the museum and its visitors is a dialogic process that enables a play between the public narratives of the museum and the private narratives of the viewers … The museum is presented as a performative site where its dominant socially and historically constructed pedagogy engages in a critical dialogue with the viewer's memories and cultural histories."

Communication is central in this process of recentering of the role of the museum vis à vis its audience. These days museums' engagement occurs more and more through new media. There is a trend toward the establishment of the 'connected museum' (Drotner and Schrøder, 2014; Parry, 2013). Museums have applied a visitors-centred approach that relies on direct communication and engagement with foreign audiences (Grincheva, 2013). Social media have been increasingly used for this purpose. Evidence of that is the

choice to use social media in foreign languages. These tools have also been used to engage these audiences directly and thus connect them to the museum's cultural content.

Whether through collaboration with foreign counterparts or engagement with foreign audiences, contemporary museums have facilitated relations among states and their citizens. As a result, museum diplomacy has become an important component of contemporary international relations, complementing governments' efforts in reaching out to foreign publics beyond official channels (Grincheva, 2020). Museums' public relations efforts have enhanced the potential of these institutions to act as tools of soft power that help project individual countries' global influence or smooth relations among them (Hoogwaerts, 2016). Their impact relies on their ability to persuade and inspire rather than impose a vision or policy.

Border-themed museums have also engaged with international relations and become involved (explicitly or not) in states' public diplomacy efforts. The cross-border nature of the subject matter they cover renders them particularly salient for international relations. Border-themed museums contain a variety of artefacts, from objects (personal items, pieces of furniture, equipment), to audiovisual material (photographs, video recordings) and archival records (stamped passports, records of entry) gathered in permanent and temporary collections that are related to or evoke the border control experience, from those who pass through these crossing points (migrants, refugees) to those who perform the border checks or assist them (border guards, supporting staff, volunteers)[4]. The narratives built for these experiences are also explicitly tied to international topics like migration, security, and conflict. Border-themed museums have also actively engaged foreign audiences through social media. The following sections present evidence of these public diplomatic efforts performed by two border control museums, namely Berlin's Check Point Charlie Museum and New York's Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration.

4 Border control museums' digital diplomacy: the cases of Check Point Charlie and Ellis Island

The data collected for this project derives from the textual and visual material that the selected museums' communication teams posted on their official Facebook accounts (in English) from January 2019 to December 31, 2021[5]. The dataset contains 2082 entries (1398 Facebook posts for the Wall Museum and 694 for the Ellis Island Museum). The choice of social media as the primary source of data stems from the fact that contemporary museums, like other public and private organisations, rely on this medium for most of their public relations campaigns (Grincheva, 2020). Facebook was selected because it is one of the most popular digital platforms used by museums to communicate with their audience. Moreover, the textual content published on its feed is typically more extensive than in other leading social media platforms allowing for a more nuanced elaboration of the themes featured in the posts.

The coding of the collected material is based on a set of categories that highlight the international dimension of the museums' communication practices. These categories include the profile of the actors featured in the posts (migrants, public officials, activists, political leaders); countries mentioned in the posts; references to international relations themes (e.g., cold war, international migration); the topic domain covered (security,

economic, social, cultural). This coding exercise consists of the tagging of recurring signifiers of content and emotions.

The approach used to examine the collected dataset is a mixed-method content analysis (Snelson, 2016). The quantitative aspect of the analysis is deployed to determine the frequency of occurrence of content items (issues, events and actors) in individual categories ('salience'[6]) and the degree of the support or opposition for a particular topic or actor ('sentiment'[7]) during the period under consideration. For the latter, attention has been paid to lexical items (e.g., negations and *intensifiers*) that shape the strength of a text (Polanyi and Zaenan, 2006). A complementary qualitative analysis is used to determine key themes and patterns in the textual data[8]. The findings of this exercise are then used to build an overarching 'narrative' centred on issues of migration and international relations. When applied to the social sciences, narratives are understood as "discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it" [Hinchman and Hinchman, (1997), p.xvi; cited in Elliott, (2005), p.3][9]. In the present context, these interconnected discourses show how the selected border-themed museums' social media engagements have contributed to the reproduction of a particular vision of borders in international relations (as symbols of order and interdependence) and of the host countries' role in the world (as beacons of freedom and opportunity).

4.1 Analysis of findings

The first element that stands out in the Check Point Charlie and Ellis Island museums' Facebook pages has to do with the conspicuous presence of international content and characters in the stories that the two institutions tell their local and global audiences. The two museums are about different subject matters and stem from particular historical contexts. When it comes to their public relations efforts on social media, they nonetheless share a similar 'outward' orientation with regard to the characters (be it individuals, groups or corporate entities) they feature and themes they address in their posts. The entries in the museums' official Facebook pages highlight the lived experiences of those who passed through the border control facilities or the role public officials played in these facilities' creation and maintenance. The subjects depicted range from political leaders to public officials (i.e., civilian and military personnel), migrants and members of civil society (see Figure 1). The majority of these subjects' nationality of origin is not from the country where the museum is located (see Figure 2). The international focus of the two museums' social media activity is also evidenced by the number of countries and international organisations mentioned in their posts (see Figure 3). These entities are featured because of their direct or indirect connections with the border crossing experience, be it as locations where migrants departed (in Ellis Island case, mostly European countries) or as active participants in shaping the sites' historical trajectory (e.g., the USA for the Berlin wall).

In the museums' social media posts, there are recurring references to historical figures with an international profile and connections with the theme of borders and border crossings. The Wall Museum features former US president George Bush Senior upon his passing, in recognition of his role in bringing down the Berlin Wall (WM, December 1, 2018[10]). The Ellis Island Museum profiles former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a Jewish refugee who fled Nazi Germany with his family (WM, July 2, 2018). The museums' social media accounts also portray contemporary figures, such as

the Russian opposition politician Alexey Navalny (WM, February 10, 2018) and the American musicians Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan, whose relatives came through Ellis Island from Italy and Russia, respectively (EIM, September 23, 2019; EIM, December 4, 2019).

Figure 1 Individuals featured in museum's Facebook posts (by profile)

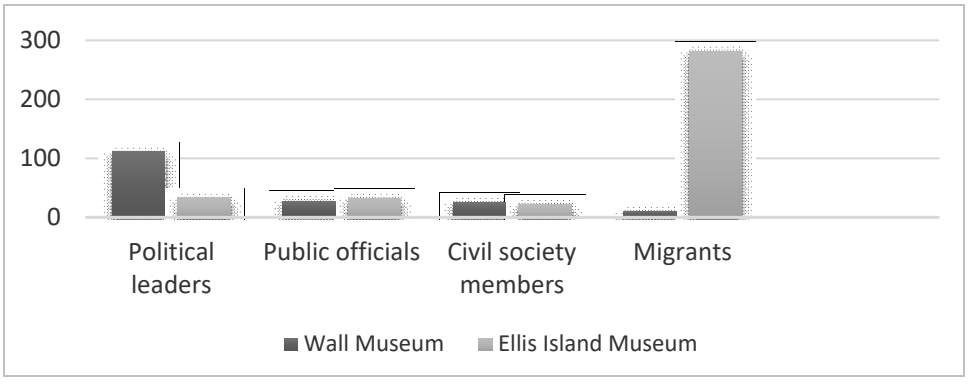


Figure 2 Nationality of individuals featured in museums' Facebook posts

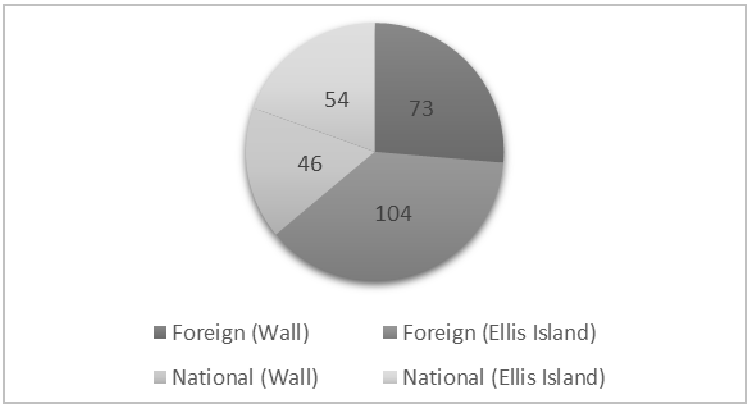
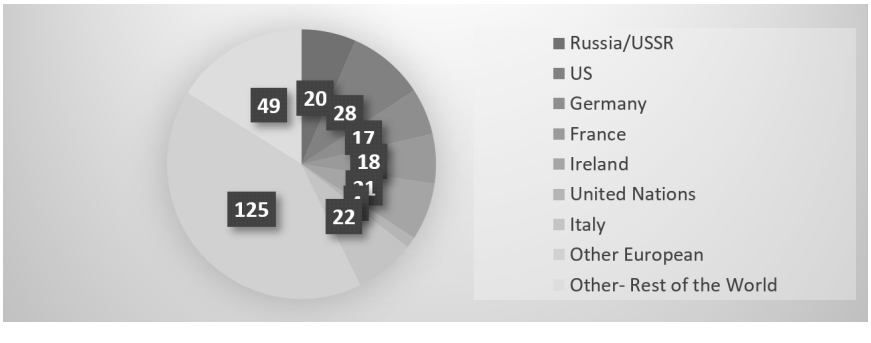


Figure 3 Countries/IOs mentioned in museums' Facebook posts



When individuals who have passed through the border control facilities are mentioned, the focus is on their connections to their countries of origin. These individuals' cross-border experience is presented as heroic, and individuals who cross borders are presented in a positive light as symbols of freedom and opportunity[11]. This is the case, for instance, of the families who used a balloon gondola to fly over the Berlin Wall to find freedom in Western Germany (WM, September 21, 2018), or the story of the Jewish woman who left Palestine and reached the USA after a long and adventurous journey through Egypt and France (EIM, October 8, 2019).

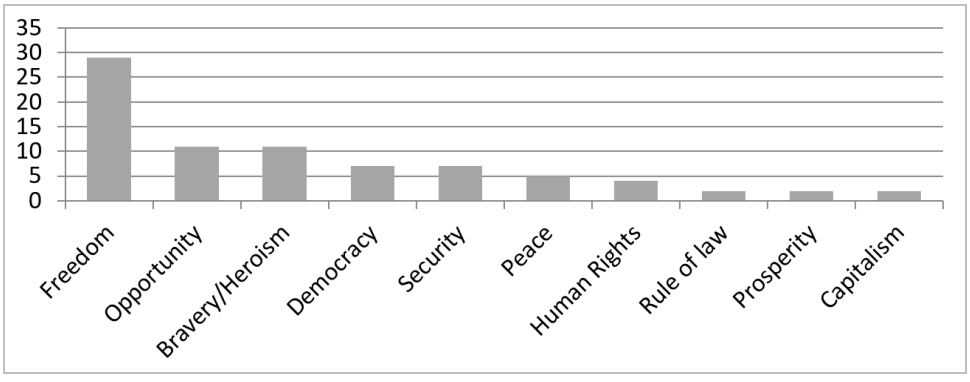
Being about memory – they celebrate arrangements that are no longer operational – the museums' Facebook accounts make frequent reference to historical events or characters. The Wall Museum, for instance, include entries thanking Allied service people for their commitment to the liberation of Berlin at the end of WWII (WM, September 5, 2018). In some instances, the references are to contemporary cases that are filtered through the lenses of the past. An example of political themes includes the frequent reference to the Cold War in the Check Point Charlie Museum. The East-West tension that the wall represented is projected in the 'new cold war' between Russia and the West, epitomised by the contemporary plight of oppressed populations in Ukraine (WM, May 20, 2019) or dissidents within Russia (WM, March 8, 2018). Connections with other events worldwide that express similar meanings are also highlighted. On the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on American soil, the Wall Museum posted a picture depicting a half-staff flag to commemorate the event (WM, September 11, 2018).

The topics addressed in the Facebook posts range from the overtly political to the more neutral ones emphasising cultural and societal exchanges that migrant's fostered[12]. The Ellis Island Museum features the profile of the first person who arrived at the facility (EIM, March 12, 2021), Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in recognition of millions of Americans who trace their origins to Ireland (EIM, March 17, 2021), black and white photos of Christmas parties at the facility (EIM, December 24 2020), or posts acknowledging the influence of Italian immigrants on the USA (EIM, October 12 2020). More politically charged themes such as global inequality, poverty, or racism, which played an important role in shaping cross-border movements, are not explicitly addressed. These themes are nonetheless implicit in some of the practices deployed at these facilities that are mentioned in the museum's posts. The Ellis Island Museum, for instance, shows a picture of detained children playing on the roof of Ellis Island. The text accompanying the picture reassures the audience by stating that "most of them were likely released and *only 2% were deported*" (EIM, September 6, 2020; emphasis added). The Museum's Facebook account also features the story of 1000 'detained aliens' who escaped from Ellis Island, clarifying that these individuals were 'deportees and stowaways' and that they were 'captured within hours of their escape' (EIM, September 1, 2019). The overwhelming representation of European countries in the museum's social media communication also foregrounds how immigration policies at the time excluded citizens from non-European countries.

As is the case for other cultural-historic heritage institutions, political themes in the Berlin Wall and Ellis Island museums are reflected in the narratives about the national identity they reproduce. However, in the museums' online communication, the international dimension takes centre stage. Indeed, the type of narrative that emerges from these institutions' public relations efforts is not limited to the host country's narrow confines. In this 'global' narrative, border control facilities constitute the pillars of a global liberal order under threat. Recurring references in the museums' Facebook pages

include terms such as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'opportunity', 'peace' and 'human rights' (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 'International Liberal Order' themes in museums' FB posts (frequency)



Both materially and symbolically, these facilities are presented as gates to economic and political emancipation, stepping stones into open and multicultural societies. This vision is in stark contrast to the oppression, inequality, and disorder that characterise the rest of the world. The Wall Museum, for instance, talks about contemporary authoritarian regimes such as Russia and Venezuela. The Ellis Island Museum makes frequent references to the economic and political challenges that characterised the countries where US-bound migrants were coming from. It is a selective narrative since it erases the darker side of the liberal global order. When issues such as inequality and detention are mentioned, for instance, they are treated unproblematically, with no questioning of the factors that contributed to it. In an Ellis Island Museum's post, the caption of a picture of migrants disembarking from a ship matter-of-factly notes that "(f)first and second class passengers would be processed and inspected on the docs", while "(t)hird class (or anyone with legal or medical issues) would be put on a ferry boat to Ellis Island for processing" (EIM, July 24, 2020). The different treatment of the two categories of migrants is not explained. In another post, there is a reference to migration quotas, which meant that some migrants had to be deported back to their country of origin (EIM, October 8, 2019). The Wall Museum glorifies freedom of movement, but it does not explicitly mention individuals (beyond East Germans) who have sought to cross Germany's borders as refugees or migrants[13]. This neutral narrative justifies the global political and economic status quo and the host country's central position within it. The museums' public relations efforts online, therefore, not only allow these institutions to reach and engage a wider audience; they are also instrumental in connecting historical artefacts and themes and events showcased in the museum to contemporary issues, in turn reinforcing the enduring relevance of the progressive values (i.e., freedom, democracy, rule of law) that the museums expound.

5 Conclusions

Because of their highly charged symbolic value, borders elicit an enduring fascination in popular imagination. This fascination is reflected in the curiosity that matters of political

boundaries have raised. A thriving tourism industry built around this theme has sought to capture this interest (Gelbman, 2010; Sofield, 2006). Public officials have also understood the symbolic appeal of borders as a way to engage both local and foreign audiences in a conversation about a country's identity, culture and society, especially in contexts where migration and other border-crossing dynamics have played an important role in shaping the local political community.

The growing presence of and interest in border-themed museums is a reflection of these trends. Since the turn of the millennium, new museums have appeared around the world. The scope of their activities has expanded, and so has attendance at their exhibitions. Their greater visibility has contributed to the growth of their role as international actors. Through their digital communication channels, border-themed museums have actively engaged foreign audiences and institutions, thus contributing to the host country's public diplomacy efforts. The cases of Check Point Charlie and Ellis Island museums exemplify these developments. The two museums have adopted different communicative strategies to tell the individual, 'national' stories of the border control facilities they commemorate. These differences stem from the nature of the cross-border movements under consideration (forced vs. economic migration) and the role that borders play in the host country's imaginary. What these narratives have in common, however, is a yearning to globalise the border control experience, both in terms of content and delivery. Border control is thus presented as a universal phenomenon whose implications can be felt and understood across and beyond national borders. Other border-themed museums around the world have contributed to the expansion of this meta-narrative. This narrative is based on the weaving of individual national stories told in a way that is appealing to a broader audience. Indeed, it is the interconnected and alluring nature of these discursive practices that constitutes the core feature of the emerging border control complex in current world affairs.

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Notes

1 For a list of migration-themed museums, see the Blog Museum and Migration, https://museumsandmigration.wordpress.com/museums/.

2 This passage from Emma Lazarus' poem 'The New Colossus' refers to migrants. The poem is engraved on the Statue of Liberty s pedestal. The monument is located next to the Ellis Island migration facility in New York.

3 On netnograhy as a qualitative research method approach applied to study of social relations on digital communications contexts (see Kozinets, 2015).

4 On the 'objects of migration' typically found in museums (see Henrich, 2011).

5 The official Facebook homepage for the Wall Museum ("Mauermuseum - Museum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie") is available at https://www.facebook.com/CheckpointCharlieMuseum/; the Ellis Island Museum ("The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation") homepage is available at https://www.facebook.com/StatueEllisFdn/. English is the primary language used in both museums' social media accounts. As of December 2021, the Wall Museum and Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration/Statue of Liberty's Facebook accounts had 7721 and 1461 followers, respectively, and 10,566 and 109,488 people who have accessed ('checked in') the page (10.4KM and 32.6K Twitter).

6 On the concept of 'salience' and its application to the study of organisations (see Van Dick et al., 2005).

7 Sentiment analysis is a text classification method that measures a text's subjectivity and opinion by focusing on a text's 'polarity' – i.e. whether a word, phrase, or sentence contains positive, negative or neutral content – and its intensity [i.e. the strength of the evaluations towards a subject topic, person, or idea (Taboada, 2016)].

8 There are some limitations resulting from the reliance on a mixed-method methodological approach used in this work to collect and analyse data generated on social media. In terms of analysis, there is ambiguity in the reading of textual content, albeit it is mitigated by human as opposed to machine reading.

9 On narrative as a method to analyse data in the social sciences (see Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005).

10 Facebook posts are referenced in this work with the museums' initials ('WM' for Wall Museum and 'EIM' for Ellis Island Museum) and the post's date.

11 'Heroism' and 'bravery' are indeed recurring themes in the museums' posts. See Figure 4.

12 It should be noted that the Wall Museum is a private entity, while the Ellis Island Museum is public. This contrasting status can explain the differences in the type and tone of the commentary that appears on their social media accounts, with the Berlin-based institution's posts containing more explicitly political content than its American counterpart.

13 Documenting the migration experience in Germany is the remit of the Cologne-based *Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration* (Eryilmaz, 2007). The museum is scheduled to open in 2027.